

Kamil Glinka (ed.)

Urban Policy System in Strategic Perspective: From V4 to Ukraine



PETER LANG

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The book focuses on the cities and urban policy systems analysed in the strategic (long-term) perspective. Due to this unique perspective, the book enables the multifactorial analysis of the conditions and mechanisms of creating the urban policy system in the Visegrad Group states and Ukraine. Undoubtedly, there is a lack of studies presenting the strategic approach to creating urban policy system discussed in the broad context of the transformations of the modern democratic state and, what is connected with it, through the prism of the processes of decentralization, Europeanization and regionalization. The monograph, in the intention of the editor and the team of authors, is to fill this undeniable gap.

The Editor

Kamil Glinka is an assistant professor at the Institute of Political Science of the University of Wrocław (Poland), an author and co-author of books and papers devoted to public governance, urban policy, place and political branding, a manager and contractor of several research projects, national and international ones.

STUDIES IN POLITICS, SECURITY AND SOCIETY

Edited by Stanisław Sulowski
Faculty of Political Science and International Studies
University of Warsaw

VOLUME 34



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Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for
at the Library of Congress.

The project is co-financed by the Governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from the International Visegrad Fund. The mission of the fund is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe.



Cover illustration: Courtesy of Benjamin Ben Chaim

ISSN 2199-028X
ISBN 978-3-631-82979-0 (Print)
E-ISBN 978-3-631-83989-8 (E-PDF)
E-ISBN 978-3-631-83990-4 (EPUB)
E-ISBN 978-3-631-83991-1 (MOBI)
DOI 10.3726/b 17772

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Berlin 2020
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This publication has been peer reviewed.

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Edit Soós

The Europeanisation of Public Administration in Ukraine. The Visegrad Group's "Best Practices"

Abstract: On September 1, 2017, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement entered into force after a long period of ratification. Despite the number of political problems, Ukraine still continues to seek integration with the EU that could be used for promoting further democratisation. In 2004, in the Kromeriz Declaration, the V4 countries expressed readiness to share their knowledge gained within the consistent processes of transition, shaping and implementing the European Union's policies. By analysis of the current status of local self-government reform, the national and V4 countries' 'best practices,' the paper argues that strengthening public administration and making it more responsive, transparent, and democratic is the result of decentralization which is therefore considered an important component of the public administration reform. The paper approaches the problem from political-administrative perspective and identifies the patterns of mutual collaboration and the fact whether the partnership between the Visegrad Group and Ukraine materialised beyond the political declarations. The findings of the study will add a new dimension to the existing knowledge on decentralization in Ukraine. The reform will only succeed when local communities become involved, participate in public administration and civil service reforms in cities, towns and villages across the country. A democratic Ukraine, fulfilling its commitments and pursuing fundamental reforms, should be offered a long-term European perspective. The study uses primary sources from the V4 ranging from statements to joint documents with third parties, and a number of secondary sources of analytical character, extracting and linking the key findings from existing research and practice.

Key words: Europeanisation, public administration, reforms, Visegrad Group, Ukraine

Introduction

Good and effective public administration is a precondition for a democratic, transparent, and effective government and has advantages and benefits both for individuals and the state. It enables governments to achieve their policy objectives and ensures the proper implementation of political decisions and legal rules, and therefore promotes political efficiency and stability. National administrations developed as state-specific structures reflecting different identities, historic

traditions of organisation, and certain underlying values, such as decentralisation or centralised unification within a state.

Europeanisation as a conceptual framework has taken on different meanings. Scholars of Europeanisation increasingly employ the concept as an access to the European sources of national politics (Hanf, Soetendorp 1997). Some emphasize the constraints on domestic policy posed by EU regulation (Radaelli 2002) referring to Olsen's claim: Europeanisation as the central penetration of national and subnational systems of governance (Olsen 2002, p. 922).

The European Union has no power to regulate or to determine state structures and territorial divisions, as it is the prerogative of the member states. However, the harmonised synthesis of values realised by the EU institutions and the member states' administrative authorities promoted the development of the European Administrative Space through creating and applying the EU law (Olsen 2003, p. 506). The Europeanisation process results in the approaching of public administration systems, and in the creation of a common core of administrative rules, principles, and practices that guide the actions within national public administration in all the member states.

The analysis of Europeanisation in the Central and Eastern European countries is based on several specific features. First, there is some similarity in the socio-economic features of the post-communist countries, where the processes of democratic transition and economic transformation are interconnected with the process of Europeanisation. Second, the states are free to organize their administrations at their own discretion, but those administrations must lead the decision-making process in a manner that would ensure a correct and appropriate execution of all the obligations set by the EU. Third, the national administrative tradition is one of the most prominent factors, to the extent that convergence is most likely to be found among groups of similar nations (Visegrad Group, Eastern Partnership), responding to the similar pressures in the similar manner, where a default setting is determined by tradition (Koprić, Musa, Novak 2011, p. 1518).

The purpose of the study is to examine the role of the Europeanisation process in the administrative reform process of Ukraine, started in 2014 and continued in 2019, to promote the democratisation of Ukraine's public administration.

Exporting the forms of governance is typical and distinct for Europe beyond the European territory. Concerning the Europeanisation practice, it is also important to examine how the EU and its regional cooperation, the Visegrad Group can facilitate the adoption of European standards and the process of decentralisation in Ukraine.

Challenges of the European Administrative Space in Ukraine

Ukraine has clearly demonstrated a commitment to establish closer links with the European Union (EU) and modernise public governance, which led to signing of the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement including an Article on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, in force since September 1, 2017. The Association Agreement is the main tool for bringing Ukraine and the EU member states closer together. The Agreement provides for a broad basis for political association and economic integration of the EU and Ukraine, promotes the respect for common European norms and values (Association Agreement 2014).

The ongoing social and economic changes along with political and legal changes require the continuous strengthening of the role of the local and regional administration which meets European challenges. Public administration reform plays a fundamental role in the European integration process. The European Union supports approximate legislation to EU standards in the reform of public administration and the reinforcement of institutions at all levels. Strengthening the local governance in line with the European standards is among the main priorities of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. The objectives and priorities set out in the Association Agreement aim at reforming the public administration and, in particular, the civil service and service in local self-government bodies, focusing on the European principles of public administration, including the finalisation and adoption of the draft Law on Civil Service Reform (Government Office for European Integration 2015, p. 44).

The national public administration structures and regulations vary among the EU member states. The Treaties of the European Union do not regulate the issue of administrative organisational structures, or the issues related to the composition, size and functioning of public administrations, and do not include a common model of public administrative system for the member states. Nevertheless, there are a few administrative principles that have been established by the Treaty of Rome, such as the judicial review of administrative decisions issued by the European institutions (Art. 173), or the obligation to justify the EU administrative decisions (Art. 190).

The EU does not interfere with the internal administrative organisation of its member states, as long as the common rules and principles are respected. Rule of law, as legal certainty and predictability of administrative actions and decisions, which refers to the principle of legality; openness, and transparency, aimed at ensuring the sound scrutiny of administrative processes and outcomes; accountability of public administration to other administrative, legislative or judicial authorities, aimed at ensuring compliance with the rule of law; efficiency

in the use of public resources and effectiveness in accomplishing the policy goals establishing in legislation and in enforcing legislation (OECD/SIGMA 2015, pp. 9–13).

In most member states, European rules and principles are enforced by the national constitution and included in administrative legislation (civil servants act, local administration act, administrative procedures) and also in financial control systems, internal and external audits, and public procurement.

With regard to the role of public administration in Ukraine, the consequence of Europeanisation is that the lack of clearly defined European model requires a predominantly receptive type of public administration. Despite its theoretical appearance, the European Administrative Space value is primarily pragmatic. The applicant countries could be expected to change and possibly converge on a single model imported from outside to reform their respective public administration (Olsen 2003, p. 519).

Ukraine's Constitutional and Legal Frameworks for Local and Regional Democracy

Ukraine has been an independent state since the declaration of its independence on August 24, 1991. Ukraine is a parliamentary-presidential unitary republic. According to the Ukrainian Constitution (1996) the highest state authority is the Supreme Council (Art. 75), the President is the head of state, and the Cabinet of Ministers is the supreme executive body (Art. 113).

In accordance with Article 133 of the Constitution, Ukraine is a unitary state with three tiers of administrative-territorial division, composed of the regions (oblast), districts (raion), cities, city districts, and villages. At the regional level, there are 24 oblasts. The regions are divided into 490 raions. Regional and district councils do not have executive powers, thus their powers are limited. They approve the programmes of socio-economic and cultural development and control their implementation, and approve district and regional budgets (Committee of the Regions 2020). The transfer of the executive powers to the raion and oblast councils is not feasible under the Constitution (Constitution 1996).

The Ukrainian Constitution (1996) recognises the organisational, financial and legal autonomy of local self-governmental bodies (Article 140). Formally, the legal environment of the local government in Ukraine complies with the European Charter on Local Self-Government which was ratified by the Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) of Ukraine on September 11, 1997. However, despite the legal framework provided in the Ukrainian Constitution and

supplementary legislation, a local government in Ukraine is dependent on the Central Government (Constitution 1996).

In centrist democracies with a horizontal division of powers among more or less independent and autonomous executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the issues of governance and public administration are purposely left to the discretion of the country. In Ukraine, there have been several attempts to reform the country's public administration system and civil service to ensure good governance.

The inefficient functioning of the structure is caused by the large number of local governments and raions, the excessive variety among units of the same level, and the mismatch between the responsibilities and organisational capacities of various units. Many smaller local authorities, particularly rural councils and smaller town councils, were incapable of providing key services due to the basic lack of resources. All these factors created parallel governing structures, triggered excessive financial expenditures, and consequently resulted in less effective performance, which made it necessary to implement reforms.

With the aim to form the effective local and territorial organisations of authority, the decentralisation reform was to provide high-quality and accessible public services consistent with the regulation of the Constitution.

Article 132 states that the territorial structure of Ukraine is based on the principles of unity and indivisibility of the state territory, "the combination of centralization and decentralization in the exercise of the state power," and the balanced socio-economic development of regions taking into consideration their historical, economic, ecological, geographic, and demographic characteristics and ethnic and cultural traditions (Constitution 1996). The specific actions of vertical decentralization cover the following areas:

- Creating an effective system of public administration that can implement cohesion and consistent policy, adequately responding to domestic and European challenges;
- Creating a modern system of local governance that promotes dynamic development of regions and delegates powers to the level closest to people;
- Financial decentralisation for a more transparent and effective use of budget funds;
- Introducing electronic governance elements to improve the performance and quality of public services and minimize corruption.

In order to build a high-quality system of governance and provision of public services, Ukraine started decentralisation in 2014 with the adoption of the Concept of the Reform of Local Government and Territorial Organisation of

Authority (1/4/2014).¹ A number of basic legal acts constitute the legislative and financial framework to support the reform: Law on Cooperation of Territorial Communities (17/6/2014), Law on Voluntary Amalgamation of Territorial Communities (5/2/2015),² and financial decentralization amendments to the Budget and Tax Code of Ukraine, concerning the minimization of impact on administration of budget revenues (Ukraine 2020).

The Cabinet of the Ministers of Ukraine established a comprehensive framework for public administration reform consisting of two strategic planning documents: the Strategy of Public Administration Reform in Ukraine for 2016–2020 and the Strategy for Public Finance Management System Reform for 2017–2020. These two planning documents cover all the six areas of the principles of Public Administration developed by SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) in 2015 to support the European Commission's approach toward public administration reforms in the associated countries.³ These are the strategic framework of public administration reform; policy development and co-ordination; public service and human resource management; accountability; service delivery; and public financial management (OECD/SIGMA 2015, p. 7).

Public administration reform in Ukraine is to achieve these objectives necessary to strengthen the democratic and independent institutions, develop local and regional authorities, depoliticise the civil service, develop e-government and increase institutional transparency and accountability.

Assistance of the Visegrad Group to Ukraine

The Visegrad Group was formed on February 15, 1991. It is considered the Central European regional cooperation scheme for political, economic, and cultural cooperation (Visegrad Declaration 1991).⁴ According to the Bratislava

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- 1 Про схвалення Концепції реформування місцевого самоврядування та територіальної організації влади в Україні. від 1 квітня 2014 р. № 333-р Київ.
 - 2 Про добровільне об'єднання територіальних громад. Відомості Верховної Ради (ВВР), 2015, № 13, ст. 91.
 - 3 SIGMA developed the Principles of Public Administration in 2014 to support the European Commission's reinforced approach to public administration reform in the European Union which was further developed and in 2015 to advance Public Administration reform within the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy.
 - 4 Regional cooperation within the EU is essential to ensure that the interests of smaller states are represented. The larger existing regional alliances: the Benelux countries and the Nordic Council.

Declaration (2011), the V4 countries have become constructive partners in Europe in implementing EU key priorities and programmes and, through their input, have contributed to political and economic integration.

After the Eastern enlargement in 2004, the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy was launched as part of the EU's foreign policy with the goal of maintaining external and internal stability and security. The Eastern Partnership was set up specifically for the EU's Eastern neighbours (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) at a summit in Prague on May 7, 2009 (Joint Declaration 2009). Since then, the Partnership has formed the foundation for the partner countries' bilateral relations with the EU, and for multilateral relations between the EU and its member states and the six partner countries. The replacement for the enlargement policy with the prospect of future membership is perceived differently by the Eastern neighbours and the level of participation differs depending on the country involved. Ukraine has pursued a clear pro-EU course since the events of the Euromaidan in 2014.⁵

The V4 operates without any institutions on its own. The mechanism of cooperation is based on meetings at various levels: the meetings of Presidents of V4 countries, the meetings of Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs with National Visegrad Coordinators and national government members taking the crucial role of initiators and rotating one-year presidency with its own presidency programme. The foreign ministries have a coordinating role.⁶

The intergovernmentalist nature of states' negotiation and institution setting implies that national governments are thus the primary decision-makers with politicians holding more responsibility for political outcomes in the Visegrad Group's internal relations. However, the Visegrad Group is very active across a range of policy areas outside the regional cooperation and beyond the external borders of the EU too.

Despite the increased importance of regional formations like the Visegrad Group or the Eastern partnership, and the apparent lack of permanent cooperation between the Visegrad Group and Ukraine, the cooperation goes a long way back and has been expressed in the forms of high-level political declarations

5 The student protests organised to force President Viktor Yanukovych and Prime Minister Mykola Azarov to sign an association agreement with the EU.

6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Table 1. The Present Structure of the Visegrad Intergovernmental Cooperation

Meetings	Main topics
Prime Ministers' meetings with a coordinating chairmanship on a rotating basis	state of cooperation, EU accession talks, strategic questions of Central Europe
Meetings of other Government members	particular questions in charge of corresponding ministries
Meetings of State Secretaries of Foreign Affairs	preparation of prime ministers' meetings, working out draft recommendations for the tactic and strategy to be pursued in the cooperation
Ambassadors' meetings	discussion on state of Visegrad cooperation
Meetings of Visegrad Coordinators	reviewing and coordinating the cooperation, preparation of the state secretaries' and prime ministers' meetings

Source: compiled by the author, based on: Böhm et al. 2018.

or other types of documents, like communiqués and statements. As early as in 2004, the Visegrad Group confirmed its interest in collaboration with Ukraine and took active part in the EU-Ukraine relations. In May 2005, Declaration of Kazimierz Dolny specified the commitment to closely cooperation: “We express our readiness to share our unique experience gained within the consistent processes of transition that our countries underwent in the past period” (Declaration of Kazimierz Dolny 2005).

Both multilateral and bilateral cooperation at the V4-Ukraine level was developed and each V4 country offered its own assistance with sectoral agenda. “Strengthening public administration, institution building or supporting the adoption of European standards” comprise the priority areas of cooperation (Declaration of Kazimierz Dolny 2005).

During the Polish Presidency (July 2016–July 2017) the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad countries reaffirmed the importance of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, and confirmed their dedication to provide practical help to pass on the V4 experience of reforms and integration processes (Joint Statement 2016). The construction of parliamentary democracy and the commitment to common values of democracy, the rule of law, transparent governance, and the government of laws, respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms, market economy, and secure integration into Euro-Atlantic structures are the common goals that Ukraine has set itself in the Association Agreement.

More than that, the V4 offers broad-scale cooperation that includes different projects, supported by the International Visegrad Fund (IVF). The project-based cooperation activities have been accelerated between the V4 and Ukraine since 2012. The coordination at the various levels of government, the exchanges of information, joint professional programmes, such as research, education, culture, energy and other projects have become regular. The consultations of experts (on bi-, tri-, or quadrilateral basis) promoted the exchange of information on long-term strategies.

Support of the IVF to Promote Public Administration Reform in Ukraine

In providing assistance to Ukraine, V4 countries responded through the International Visegrad Fund (IVF). The IVF through grant and scholarship programmes supports the projects and programmes which concentrate on the development of public administration, and also on the areas such as democratisation, social and economic transformation and modernisation, the building of civil society and regional cooperation. Ukraine is the biggest non-V4 recipient of support from the Fund.

On December 16, 2014 a joint visit of the Foreign Ministers of the V4 countries was held, during which the Ministers confirmed their dedication to provide practical help to pass on the V4 experience of reforms and integration processes (Declaration 2014). The Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group (July 2014–June 2015) strengthened the coordination of assistance to its Eastern neighbour and has also initiated the V4 Roadshow in Ukraine project that focused on sharing the transformation experience of V4 countries. The project comprised of a series of roundtable meetings with various Ukrainian stakeholders, focusing on different areas of the reform agenda. The partners agreed with a division of labour to be applied in accordance with specific topics. In April 2015, the first joint event between the V4 and Ukraine on the subject of decentralization and public administration reform was held in Chernihiv under the auspices of Poland. In October 2015, a roundtable on educational reform led by the Czech Republic was held in Chernivtsi. In February 2016, the Slovak Republic held a conference on energy efficiency in Lviv, followed by a conference on small and medium enterprises, organised by Hungary in Vinnytsia in April 2016.

The regions and municipalities are actively involved in V4 and Ukraine cooperation thereafter territorial reforms have become a major feature of public administration reform. The Ukrainian government adopted the territorial programme in 2014 and the decentralisation has become a flagship policy goal. Local governments were further strengthened by the progress in the decentralisation

Table 2. Change in the Number of Municipalities

Countries	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014
The Czech Republic	4100	6230	6242	6254	6248	6250	6253
Hungary	1381	3137	3154	3158	3168	3175	3177
Poland	2383	2475	2489	2491	2478	2479	2479
Slovakia	2826	2858	2878	2891	2891	2890	2890
Ukraine	10572	11338	11566	11615	11623	11622	11624

Source: Territorial Reforms in Europe – TOOLKIT 2017, pp. 12–13.

reform launched in 2015. The subnational dimension of the V4–Ukraine cooperation and the incorporation of bottom-up structures into regional and local initiatives were supported by the International Visegrad Fund.

In the Central European countries, the local government system became fragmented and asymmetrical after constitutional and self-government reforms. Due to the historically centralized national states, the sub-national levels lacked important competencies and political power. There was a consensus about the need to fill the gap between the central government and subnational level, which could provide counterweight to the strong central administrative, political and economic power (Pálné, Kovács 2008, pp. 25–26).

Similar processes took place in Ukraine, as at the local level, the number of municipalities increased in the early 1990s. Local governments were very small, with a large proportion of them in settlements with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. Between 1990 and 2014, the number of local governments increased from 10,572 to 11,624. The number of towns remained relatively stable (280) and the number of cities with raion status increased from 149 to 182. The population size of the local government decreased from 4,990 in 1991 to 3,700 in 2014 with several thousands very small local governments, each with a population of under 1,000 (Territorial Reforms in Europe – TOOLKIT 2017, p. 102).

Since 2014, Ukraine has been conducting a political decentralization process which is an amalgamation of small municipalities and a reallocation of political, administrative and financial competencies to these merged and enlarged local communities (*hromada*).⁷ The reform is accompanied by parallel “sectoral decentralization,” above all in public health and education.

7 In 2015, as many as 794 local governments amalgamated into 159 new *hromadas*. In 2016, another 946 towns and villages merged into new 208 *hromadas*. 201 towns

The public administration reform entered a new phase in 2019. With the financial and expert support of the European Union, the second phase of decentralization envisages the administrative-territorial reform, a radical decrease in the number of raions. The central government is seeking to change the institutional framework for raions and oblasts by allowing directly elected councils to create their own executive organs.

A significant change in the number of municipalities during the whole 2014–2019 period, the reduction in the number of local governments have been a rationalisation process against the fragmentation in the early 1990s. By July 2019, there had been 968 new amalgamated hromadas created across the country (European Commission 2019, p. 3).

Transforming V4 Countries’ “Best Practices”

In the process of subnational level integration forms gained greater importance in the formation of neighbourhood policy in V4 countries. The transfer of experience of local and territorial governments on different policy areas related to the Europeanisation of public administration of Ukraine can foster and facilitate the approximation of Ukraine to the European standards. The V4 countries are ready to offer expertise, technical and logistic support to the Government of Ukraine in developing and subsequently implementing programmes and transmit “good practices” of the Visegrad Group.

The most successful projects belong to **Education and Capacity Building** (knowledge transfer, lifelong learning, innovative educational tools). Decentralisation and administrative reform are related to the capacity-building of local and regional authorities. Nevertheless, the implementation of public administration reforms is going on slowly at local and regional levels and the qualification of civil servants service is still problematic.

As Table 3 shows, due to the lack of basic competences among public servants in their core activities in the context of decentralisation, Visegrad grand projects support the building of capacity in local and regional authorities, and staff training for governmental and municipal service. To establish efficient relations with the public and provide them with higher quality municipal services the

and villages created new 40 local government units in 2017. Altogether almost 2,000 small local governments were merged into over 400 new, enlarged units, so the overall number of a local governments has reduced by over 1,500.

Table 3. List of Approved Visegrad Grants (2010–2018)

Oblast	Education and Capacity Building	Innovation, R & D, Entrepreneurship	Regional Development, Environment & Tourism	Public Policy & Institutional Partnership	Democratic Values & Media	Culture & Common Identity
Berehovo			1			1
Chernihiv	1		2		1	
Chernivtsi	1		2		1	
Crimea	1					
Dnitropetrovsk	1			1		
Donetsk	1					
Ivano-Frankivsk	3			1		
Kharkiv	3	3	2	1		
Kherson	1		1			2
Khust	1		1			
Kyiv	13	3	1	9	4	
Lviv	4		1	2	3	1
Luhansk	1					
Lutsk	4	2		1		1
Melitopol	1	1				
Mykolayiv	1			1		
Odessa	1			1		
Ostroh				1		
Rivne			2			
Slavutych						
Ternopil	1			1		1
Vinnitsia	2			3		
TOTAL	41	9	13	22	9	6

Source: International Visegrad Fund 2020.

acquisition of digital technologies is closely related with educational programmes and projects.

Regarding training and professional development programmes some of the best cases are illustrated by the projects: 'Capacity Building of Local Communities' (2015), the V4 flagship project 'Transfer of V4 Experience and Building Capacity of Civil Society in the Field of Financial Education' (2015), and the 'Educational System Management of Local Communities: V4 Countries Experience for Ukraine' (2017). The training often includes public servants and also the members of local and regional councils.

The **Public Policy and Institutional Partnership** is the second most frequent field of cooperation. It concerns the successfully implemented projects that promote cooperation in public administrations between public institutions and regional authorities. Moreover, the V4 countries offered their help with Ukraine's transition and reform process, providing the twinning programme for the Ukrainian state officials and other technical assistance. Based on the cooperation on the ground between Ukrainian and Visegrad Group cities, municipalities and regions, the project 'Transferring V4 Experience in Regional Cooperation' (2013) facilitates strengthening contacts between governmental levels. The strong coordination of sector policies among V4 and Ukrainian partners could heighten the cooperation and deepen the exchange of views.

There is a significant participation in the fields of **Regional Development, Environment and Tourism**. The projects like 'Development Through Land Use Planning' (2014) or 'V4 Experience on Strategy Planning' show that the cooperation in various expert meetings, aimed at exchanging the experience and know-how, can deepen the knowledge and expand practice in issues like water/air quality, waste management, biodiversity, the protection of natural heritage, climate and tourism in the context of economic and social development.

In the fields of Innovation, research and development, entrepreneurship, the project 'Business, human rights responsibilities: experience of the V4 for Ukraine' (2016) reveals how to promote the development of the poor business and investment climate in Ukraine.

It may also be worth extending some institutional linkages and "best practices" to spill over into V4 structure. The project 'National University of Water Management and Environmental Engineering' (2017) highlights the importance of the research and networking of educational institutions. The Visegrad cooperation is a "very good vehicle" for considering different public policy possibilities, and for engaging some of the experience to Ukraine. Intensifying cooperation in other non-political areas (climate, environment, nuclear energy) and different

innovation-related and investment programmes are highly recommended during the application procedure of the IVE.

The focus area **Democratic Values and Media** covers anti-corruption mechanism, open government initiatives, free speech, media and journalism. The corruption level significantly inhibits the development of governmental authorities as a whole. Thus, educational anti-corruption programmes are among the priorities and it is vital to develop a new methodology of communication with people to change their behaviour. The project European Experience of Communication Strategy Development (2012) is a good example for a successful Visegrad Fund project which is about how to improve the low level of communication with citizens and the low level of trust in public authorities.

Providing high-quality administrative services on the ground makes corruption apprehendable and possible to overcome, with a simultaneous increase of transparency. The projects like Deconstruction: the Role of Media in Post-totalitarian Societies (2018) provide a forum to share the information and experience on the partner countries' steps toward transition, reform, and modernisation. Facilitating the development of common positions and joint activities is done by means of another project Strengthening of Professional Networking for Impartial Journalism in V4 Region and Ukraine (2019). The role of the media is critical in providing the public with reliable information. Interactive training programmes in journalism and on communications in central and local governments draw attention to approaches and methods of European standards in journalism.

Finally, the aim of the projects covering the **Culture and Common Identity** is to strengthen regional identity building and foster dialogue on cultural cooperation. Visegrad Academy of Cultural Management (2013) is a perceptible assistance to maintain and nurture cultural heritage and promote youth mobility. The project Visegrad Cinema Days (2018) facilitated intercultural dialogue via approaching the screenings of modern films from around the Visegrad Group region.

Conclusion

The cooperation established by the Visegrad Group is important for the V4 countries themselves and is an added value to the secure and prosperous European Union. Progress has been made in aligning the Ukrainian legal systems to European standards and the professionalisation of the administrative system.

The decentralization of public administration and local government reforms is considered as one of the main objectives to reach in the upcoming years on Ukraine's agenda. The start of a territorial consolidation of municipalities and an

accompanying empowerment of local governments have been, so far, the main achievement of decentralization. The first steps have already produced good results. The strategic goal of this reform is to create proper physical and organisational conditions, safe, and comfortable environment for the people in Ukraine, and to ensure openness, transparency, and citizen's participation in addressing public issues. The gaps and shortcomings of the Constitution of Ukraine will have to be eliminated in order to ensure the successful ending of the public administration reform.

The democratisation of Ukraine has not been completed yet. But the cooperation with the Visegrad Group countries should continue. The intensity of the cooperation, the various meetings of the representatives of the V4 countries and Ukraine have not reached yet the same level. It is foreseen that the Visegrad cooperation will develop not only between the governments, but also in form of other forums and forms of cooperation, such as the intensive contacts between local and regional levels and civil society. The multi-level approach appears to be the most comprehensive to expose the nature of the V4 and Ukraine future relations.

Coming to horizontal dimension of the V4–Ukraine relations, the aim is to foster the interconnection and interaction between different stakeholders: the creation of broad partnerships between the political, economic, cultural, and civil actors, with regional and local authorities, and all public or private entities (universities, chambers of commerce, foundations, etc.) with result in closer cooperation with citizens.

The sectoral dimension of the Visegrad cooperation, the wide scope of cooperation in different fields aimed at promoting modernisation in Ukraine, may be the most essential part of the V4–Ukraine cooperation. “Visegradization” of sector policies and closer coordination with V4 partners in single policy areas accelerate the development of public policies.

The learning process is slow, the V4 countries’ “best practices” are accepted, the European standards are respected moderately and gradually. The Visegrad Group continues to assist different development programmes by the support of the IVF. The reforms will bring Ukraine closer to the European Union and contribute to the realisation of Ukraine’s European aspirations.

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